

Present

Committee members: Charles Bonenti, Kim Burnham, Van Ellet, Cheryl Shanks, Cathy Yamamoto (chair); Absent: Bilal Ansari

Attendees with affiliations (not necessarily formally representing them):

Betty Ann Labombard (director, Housing Authority)
Rosemary Lane (resident, Gail Cariddi's office)
Robin Lenz (Higher Ground)
Peter Mehlin (Housing Authority and Council on Aging)
Kathy Thompson (Housing Authority, Youth Center)
Chris Winters (Town Planning Board, CPC)
Grace Winters (resident)
Olivia Winters (resident)

Business

1. Discussion with Housing Authority.

Visiting members of the Housing Authority and Van Ellet (member of both HA and AHC) presented information about the programs and sites that they manage, explaining which are federal v. state, which are individually tied and which are tied to sites, and so forth.

The HA members made a few additional points:

A. Covering the gap between what Section 8 recipients can pay and the actual rent on their apartments uses up enough money that even though they are authorized to provide 97 vouchers they can only fund 78.

B. New state law allocates a set amount per unit per year for upkeep. Williamstown HA expects only \$130,000 to cover the next four years of upkeep for all properties.

C. Income-based housing has been available in Adams even while there were waiting lists in Williamstown. Some people have chosen to remain wait-listed in Williamstown instead of being housed immediately in Adams.

2. Minutes. The minutes of the January 11 meeting were approved.

3. Information gathering updates.

A. 2010 census data for Williamstown does not include income. It's unclear how to get this except by using old 5-year projections based on the 2000 census.

B. We could use an income/age breakdown for the residents at Proprietors' Fields.

4. Work of related town committees and organizations

A. Higher Ground stopped funding displaced Spruces residents when FEMA money kicked in, so if residents are living in motels, they are paying for that themselves. Right now, 56 people are considered to be in housing that is untenable in the long term (e.g., more than they can afford, on a friend's couch, etc). 63 housing units successfully continued in the Spruces, but all 63 are in some sense still untenable in the long-term as this is a flood plain.

B. Proprietors Fields new building would have 20 to 25 units.

C. Conservation Commission received the news that the AHC might ask for a slice of CC-controlled land to be detached for affordable housing with neither hostility nor enthusiasm. Commission members likely vary in how open they would be to starting the process of taking land out of conservation.

D. Planning Board has a hearing on the accessory housing warrant on February 14. Chris Winters points out that the AHC might recognize that other possible zoning changes, such as reduced minimum lot size and/or reduced frontage requirements, could affect the property market in ways that would likely result in more housing being built. Winters also said that inclusionary zoning laws can be double-edged in that they force large-scale projects to include housing but also create an incentive for projects to be just under that large scale. If this floor were lowered and/or a payment in lieu of building were accepted, this could be a source of funds for affordable housing in town.

E. Fire department. News that the fire and police departments have identified a new site led to discussion of Photec. Apparently it still needs remediation. If the town safety employees want it and it needs remediation, it is not on our launching pad as we thought it could be.

5. Work of the Affordable Housing Committee

A. Housing trust. Because in the near term the town can supply the services that a housing trust would provide, and because the trust's composition and oversight need to be worked out, this is something that the committee will continue to investigate and perhaps pursue, but not consider pressing. Kim relays that warrant articles are due March 26, are signed by Selectmen the week of April 9, and are then published. Town meeting is May 15.

B. Housing needs assessment. The committee members discussed whether the committee itself should begin a housing needs assessment based on the data it has gathered or should expect that paid staffers would do this once the CPA

money has been allocated to hire them. Separately, the state regional planning board is available to run assessments and projections, for a fee.

C. Purchasing property with potential. The committee discussed whether it should be on the lookout for newly available properties that had the right characteristics for AH development. The Beverly property, 936-956 N Hoosac Rd at Summer St., could be one. The committee is unsure whether it should fill this role. If it did, it would need funds on hand, which is where a housing trust might be helpful.

D. Advocacy. The committee discussed the extent to which its role is to advocate for policies and efforts that others have initiated. The committee agreed that this was important when a policy had a clear and direct relationship with affordable housing, but not when the connection was somewhat more indirect. The committee will advocate for the accessory housing warrant.

E. Core and Delegation. If the committee's key roles are to identify opportunities for, and help to organize the creation of, affordable housing, then there seem to be two models of how to do this. After the committee identifies a site and helps to organize support on the town side (warrants or CPC funds, inspections), it could come to terms with a private developer who would then acquire funding and build, as it did with Church Corners; or it could sell/transfer the property to a nonprofit and ask the Housing Authority to manage it. That might be similar to the Mohawk Forest development run in North Adams by the Caleb Foundation. Whether one or the other should be followed or ruled out is unclear.

F. Population served. The AHC can think of the population it serves in terms of current, actual demand for housing in Williamstown (who is on the waiting lists, who lives in town now) but also in terms of the population that it would like to support. For example, it is possible that the greatest demand is for elderly housing, but this is because there is already attractive elderly housing that people are willing to be wait-listed for, whereas young family housing is not demanded because it is barely present. The committee can be prospective as well as reactive when it thinks about which groups to prioritize.

G. Hiring. Can the AHC identify people who have been involved in affordable housing projects in the past, and try to get people on board now, or do we need to be formal and ask for applications and bids and such?

Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 15, 7:00 pm, Town Hall.